

## The Bloody Boys

by Luki Dimension

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Summary: Nana heralds from a family of serial killers. She neglects to mention this to her husband " mainly because he used to be a target. When Iemitsu makes it clear he doesn't expect Tsuna to join his family, Nana brings him into hers.

## The Bloody Boys

\_And to think, I complained when BTCOM went over 10k...\_

\_Somewhere, deep in the Internet, someone once spoke about Sawada Nana being a serial killer, and I just ran with it. About a year later and 16k in, I'm pretty sure its as good as it's gonna get, so enjoy.\_

\_Rated for vague deaths, heavily hinted deaths/possible torture and Tsuna and Xanxus's language.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>The Bloody Boys<strong>

When she was three years old, Nana's father had presented her with her very first knife and showed her how to carve up a roast.

Just before she turned four, he brought a live pig home and had her slit its throat in the most efficient way possible.

When she was five, he took her to the hidden basement and had her do the same to the man who had been watching her in the playground for the past week.

The rules were simple. Certain people in this world didn't deserve to live. If one couldn't be a polite and functioning member of society, one shouldn't be a member of society. The corrupt, the lazy, the rude

â€" criminals and those who made a living dancing along the line. There was no lack of prey, and few people cared when they 'vanished'.

They were providing a service, her father explained, over chemicals and plastic gloves. Blood ran in their family â€" it was an itch that was best scratched through training, rather than having it expressed when she hit her teens. He'd been taught by his father, who had been taught in turn by his mother.

It was always difficult to decide to bring children in, he admitted. Generally, they only taught one, the oldest â€" and allow the others to grow up oblivious so their partners could have a child too. Nana's aunt and uncle had no idea, and her father warned that her future husband would probably never understand either.

But that was okay. Her parents were happy despite this giant secret â€" Nana was certain she could be the same.

The most important thing was the disguise. To outsiders, Nana's father was a dim and overblown figure, who worked a very low position at a very mediocre company. His most memorable features were his oblivious air and how much he loved his family. Nobody got to see him with the curtain dropped â€" the sharp intelligence and sadistic grin he got when he prepared electrical wires for his preferred attacks. Only Nana got to see him like this â€" and she styled herself after him.

All the family learned knives, and then spread out to find their own style. Her grandfather had used an axe, her father added electrical current â€" but Nana was a traditionalist. She continued to use her knives.

Although her father couldn't help but smile when she asked if she might use her latest corpse in the evening's dinner.

Nana really didn't like waste.

\* \* \*

><p>There was only one thing her father ever feared for her. And that was contracting her services. It was a one way street â€" their family were best left as unknowns. Sometimes they did decide to ally themselves with others, but if they did, their family, their lives, would never be the same.<p>

"Never do it, unless you're certain you're not satisfied in the shadows" he ordered. "You'll obtain power and range that you'll never get on your own, but there will be times you need to kill people not on your list."

Nana had completely understood. She had no need for fame â€" Namimori was full enough of meat for her. Even when her father passed away, and she graduated high school, she was content. A handful of people knew her true nature, the Hibari's had been aware of her family for generations (and were happily content to let them be so long as they continued to go after criminals only), and there was an assassin that had crossed her father several years ago, but he'd kept their secret so long as they kept his.

Then she met Sawada Iemitsu.

\* \* \*

><p>At first, he'd been a target. She knew he was involved with organised crime, though exactly what she wasn't sure. He'd walked in to the restaurant she worked at, and she'd encouraged a conversation, trying to figure out his schedule " and a decent time or location she could either kill him, or knock him out and take him to the basement.<p>

To her astonishment, he ended up asking her out. The more astonishing thing was her saying yes.

He was freedom. She could feel it exuding from his every pore " some people just felt that way, but she'd never been so close to one like him. His smile, his humour, his sheer elation at life.

And 90% of it was an act " she'd bet her best knives on it. But it was an act her father had worn his entire life.

A favour or two given to the Hibari's, and she had information. He was mafia " but as far as criminal families went, it could have been worse. The current boss was clearly trying to steer away from the darker aspects of crime " and Iemitsu belonged to a separate organisation, which was mostly about protecting the family from the outside.

Nana could certainly understand that.

So when Iemitsu got down on one knee and proposed, instead of slitting his throat, she smiled and held out her hand.

Two people wearing oblivious smiles to hide their true nature from the other. She couldn't write a better happy ending for herself.

\* \* \*

><p>She'd already loved the baby growing inside her, but the second Tsunayoshi was placed in her arms, those feelings felt mediocre compared to the feelings blossoming at her baby's chubby face.<p>

Iemitsu is just as besotted, huddled at her side and gushing at their son's features, and Nana feels the first stirrings of unease.

She should train her baby to follow her footsteps " but Iemitsu belongs to a 'family' that places strong value on blood relations. Especially with lineage and firstborns.

He holds her tight to her chest, pushing down the concerns. She has until he's three to make a decision " if Iemitsu comes clean and wants to bring Tsuna into his family, Nana will have to let him go, and have another child to take his place.

It's only fair.

So Nana waits. She watches her son grow up, learn how to walk and talk, while Iemitsu spends less and less time in Japan. Her little boy has inherited her father's freeing presence " though he doesn't

seem to understand how to control it. Sometimes it even appears as a soft glowing flame enveloping the boy, drawing her and those around them closer. Children in the playground are sensitive to it even without the fire, but don't understand why and take it out on him. Hopefully Iemitsu will realise and show him how to use it.

Iemitsu does notice, on one of his trips home. However, this visit also has him accompanied by his 'boss'. Nana watches them in the garden, listening in on the conversation though not really understanding it.

When Tsuna is brought back inside, Nana's knees almost buckle at howâ€|dim Tsuna feels. What was once a shining beacon is nothing more than a tiny flicker. What have they done to her child?

It's terrifying enough that she questions it that evening, asking in her crafted housewife persona, if Iemitsu wants Tsuna to come work with his father when he's older.

"I think Tsuna would love to travel the world with his Daddy" she chimes up. Iemitsu chuckles, scratching his head and looking just a little bit nervous.

"Oh I think our little Tuna-fish will be too grown up to be spending time with old men by then" he replies. "Besides, wouldn't you be lonely if he joined his Daddy?"

Nana nodded in agreement. "I do love having Tsu-kun to myself" she agrees.

That settles it. If her husband has no interest in making their son part of his world, then he certainly can't complain about him becoming part of hers.

The night after Iemitsu and 'Nono' leave, she gives him his very first knife lesson.

\* \* \*

><p>Yamamoto Tsuyoshi was aware of Sawada Nana and her family. However, he killed for profit while she (generally) killed to paint the walls red, so they didn't interact. As such he never bothered to warn the blonde Sawada about what he was marrying, and in return, Nana didn't filet Tsuyoshi when he met <em>her <em>and decided to hang up the sword.

The future Mrs Yamamoto was the most incredible woman Tsuyoshi had ever met. Every day in the courtship he woke up and wondered how the hell he'd found a woman so perfect. Her only flaw was apparently thinking Tsuyoshi was good enough for her.

For him, the sword had been a means to an end â€" he'd never strived to be the best, only seen it as a tool, so perhaps it was understandable that he'd been able to give up such a promising career before he hit his prime for one more suitable for a civilian.

Unfortunately, quitting the darker side of life wasn't always that easy. Despite his best attempts, scum would track him down, intent on ending his life. These poor fools were easily sent home missing their

heads â€" assuming Sawada Nana didn't hunt them first; an unexpected bonus of living so close to a serial killer of criminals. He managed to hide most of them from his family â€" once little Takeshi was born; his wife didn't need to have the extra paranoia that kept him awake at night. Besides, by the time Takeshi turned seven he'd been out of the game nearly a decade â€" most people didn't even remember his name anymore.

Perhaps that overconfidence betrayed him. Or maybe it was just karma catching up with him â€" how long had they watched him, waiting for the one day he forgot to place his sword by his bedside? Let him wake up to screams and smashed glass, watch him lunge for a weapon that wasn't there as steel sliced through the air?

It pierces his skin as he rolls away, his opponent missing anything vital, but turns when he's out of reach, to see the other target trying to slip away.

Instincts had reacted before his heart. The assassin in his head had forgotten he wasn't alone in his bed.

He lunges for him. Grabs him by the shoulders and pulls him away.

But not before the sword slices through her neck and drops her to the ground.

â€|In full view of the small boy who had, with insatiable curiosity instead of good sense, run towards the screams instead of away.

A shadow moves, and Tsuyoshi curses â€" he hadn't even registered the other man.

"Takeshi! Run!" he bellows, and the boy barely hesitates before darting out of sight. Heavy footfalls for such a tiny frame, while the other enemy follows with lethal speed.

It takes seconds he doesn't have to snap his assailants neck. Seconds Takeshi doesn't have. There's no sign of them on the second floor â€" his son must have run downstairs, in hopes of escaping outside.

â€|Or to reach the knives and defend himself.

He all but jumps down the stairs when he hears the scream, and reaches the ground floor just in time to see the other man jerk back, and fall to the ground behind the counter. When he runs over, it's just in time to see Takeshi buckle and fall against the wall.

Shigure Kintouki held awkwardly in his hands, stained with blood, before returning to the form of a bamboo blade.

The hit had clearly been nothing but luck. Takeshi had seen the sword and swung it. His opponent, either unaware of Kintouki's ability or unbelieving that a child could use it, hadn't stopped. His own momentum had made up for Takeshi's lack of strength, and his height had found the sword piercing his belly. Between damaged organs and the blood loss, the man had already stopped twitching by the time Tsuyoshi had his son in his arms, whispering frantic apologies.

Apologies his son didn't appear to hear, lost in his own world.

He refused to let go of the sword.

It was awkward after that. Explaining why he had two professional hitmen dead in his house, along with the body of his wife and a child who clung to a bamboo blade like a security blanket to police would have been next to impossible.

Instead, he'd called the Hibari family. Who had in turn sent in police on their payroll that could take care of the necessities. Tsuyoshi's wife had died in a robbery gone wrong " the men involved had died in a crash after escaping the house.

Takeshi spent the entire time in his room, huddled on his bed with the sword. It wasn't until the morning, that he even registered his father's presence.

"I thought it would be like hitting a ball" Takeshi whispered, clutching the sword tight to his chest. "But then the sword changed and " and it made a 'squish', not a 'whack' and he fell down."

His eyes dropped to his chest, as if only just noticing the blood dried on his skin. "It felt warm and cold, and he wouldn't get up."

Tsuyoshi nodded, running a hand through his son's hair. "I know. It's an awful feeling, but Takeshi, it wasn't your fault. It was self-defence, nothing more."

"I killed him."

"He attacked you" Tsuyoshi insisted. "There's nothing wrong with what you did."

Takeshi frowns, as if he doesn't understand what his father is saying.

"I know that."

Tsuyoshi hesitates, questioning his reply, and Takeshi shakes his head.

"I'm not sorry I killed him. He helped killed ka-san. But if I was going to do it, why didn't I do it earlier? If I had, she would be-be" "

He couldn't finish the words, and burst into tears before seeking solace in his father's arms.

Tsuyoshi eventually pried the sword from his son's arms, but his son's reaction to that night still unsettled him. On the one hand, he was grateful his son wasn't experiencing the expected trauma from the kill, but on the other, that kind of reaction

Takeshi didn't really smile after that. He closed his eyes and pasted on a fake bland mask that strangled Tsuyoshi's innards. Nobody else could see it, but he couldn't think of any way to rip it off. In desperation, he started talking to the air in solitude, begging any that might here for the answer to bringing it back.

His prayers, rather horrifyingly, were answered. One day, less than a month later, his son came home with a true smile and earnest eyes. But following him through the door...his heart dropped as he recognised the small frame of Sawada Tsunayoshi.

"I met him in the park Tou-san" his son explained. "He knew about the men, and said I had strong eyes. He understands."

Which might have been the most horrifying thing his son has ever said. Sawada is watching them, head slightly cocked but ultimately uninterested in the conversation. He already knows, Tsuyoshi realises, that he won't forbid this friendship. The small boy has done more in a few hours than Tsuyoshi has achieved in weeks "Takeshi will resist any attempt to pry them apart.

At least Sawada had a code " it's hard to tell if she's started teaching her son (though with those eyes he's pretty certain), but if she has, he can take comfort in knowing there will be rules. When Takeshi asks to learn the sword, he took the request to focus and drag himself out of his depression, by force if need be. Takeshi had terrifying instincts; he could at least try to focus them while he was still young.

Still 7 years old and already on a path of blood. Perhaps Takeshi's fate was his father's final punishment.

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><p>Sasagawa Ryohei's first word was Extreme. This made his parents both proud and confused.<p>

This quickly changed to terrified when he chose to say it jumping out a second floor window. The eldest Sasagawa liked things exciting, and dangerous, and by the time the daughter came into their lives, both were run ragged.

Thankfully, blessedly, having another child in the house seemed to calm their son. Although he declarations of Extreme were still often and proud, he seemed to curb himself in the home, as his antics seemed to upset his sister.

Ryohei considered upsetting Kyoko to be the greatest crime a man could commit. However, there was only so long he could curb his need from Extreme action. At first, he could channel it through fighting but Kyoko hated that so he went into boxing. An extreme sport that he loved.

But by the time he was ten that itch was back. There were few people that could actually give him a good fight, and the rules meant he had to hold back. Just as his adrenaline began pumping, and his opponent collapsed, he had to back off " like shoving a muzzle on an attack dog.

He hated it. He wanted to embrace that kick again, to feel the extreme joy of being alive one could only get from being inches from death. Never mind fights where the worst conclusion was a knockout " he wanted to know his opponent might not let him walk away at all.

With such a short grip on his temper and need, he took to running late at night, as to keep Kyoko from fretting. But when his actions caught the attention of several high schoolers kicking about the less regulated parts of town, he found himself pinned to the wall of an alley, facing three teens and a knife.

They spoke threats and mocking laughter. Ryohei heard nothing but the chains holding him back snapping, and threw a punch that knocked his assailant to the ground.

All of them were bigger and infinitely more threatening, but Ryohei was stronger, and faster " and thanks to their location, they had nowhere to run.

How long the fight went on, he couldn't remember. But when he finally caught his breath, he registered three bodies on the ground, their faces smashed beyond recognition, blood seeping into the pavement.

His throat was raw " he'd probably been yelling, and dimly, in the back of his head, he was vaguely aware that he should probably be panicking at the three most likely dead teens he'd just savaged.

But he wasn't. Instead, for the first time in years he felt calm. At peace.

"Enjoy that?"

His head jerked up, staring at the entrance. A boy with wild brown hair was watching him, hand held by a woman with a bob and a pleasant smile. Neither seemed bothered by the scene, and Ryohei could only glance down at the bodies once more, before looking up and nodding.

"It was extremely satisfying."

The woman nodded back, though her eyes were sharp.

"Want to do it again?"

Ryohei swallowed, biting down the instinctive 'yes' and trying to think of Kyoko. His poor, sweet innocent sister who would be so disappointed in him.

It didn't matter " the answer must have been plain on his face, as the boy smiled and walked over, holding out a hand.

"I'm Tsuna, want to be friends?"

Ryohei stared back, before grinning and grabbing it tightly, lifting himself off the body he'd just maimed.

"I would like that to the Extreme!"

Later that night, after the Sawada's take him home and wash off the blood before taking him home, while his parents apologised to Nana for their son causing trouble so late at night, Kyoko was so happy.

"I'm so glad my brother finally has a friend!" she says. "Do you like



things to be extreme too Tsuna-kun?"

"Sometimes" Tsuna replies. "Sasagawa-san and I have a lot in common when it comes to extreme things."

A friend who understands and a sister who is happy about it. It's Ryohei's best day ever. He even insists that Tsuna starts calling him brother "such a great guy should clearly be family."

He never questions why the police never found the bodies.

Later, he learns that they never do.

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><p>Despite Tsuyoshi's fears and Nana's expectations, the three children don't actively hunt together. Tsuna is still being trained, too young and inexperienced to be let out alone, Takeshi is practising the sword, but lacks the muscle and body strength he'll need to make it effective, and Ryohei's fists, now sated with their first blood, have calmed to a point where boxing is an effective stress relief.<p>

That doesn't stop them from brainstorming. They sit in the park or at the caf  downtown while Nana does groceries and people watch. Tsuna is by far the best at spotting the thieves and would-be muggers, although Takeshi has a budding talent for spotting fighters. He's surprisingly accurate at figuring out which ones are secretly sporting tattoos.

Ryohei is utterly hopeless, picking people out at random and looking at his friends like an eager puppy, but he never seems to let him get it down.

"He's a thief."

Both Tsuna and Takeshi glance over from their seats, before looking away.

"Just because he didn't take a bag doesn't mean he stole those things brother."

"It's extremely possible!"

They nod, but keep looking, before Takeshi grins at a familiar man heading their way.

"It's him again. We followed him last week right?"

Tsuna smiles. "Yes. He's a low level grunt for the Touzen. Bet he's collecting protection money again."

Takeshi has a brilliant grin on his face. "Think if we ask Maman really nicely we can take his hideout before they collect again?"

Tsuna shakes his head.

"Maybe on your birthday."

\* \* \*

><p>Tsunade misses his flames.<p>

It's odd â€" he barely remembers them, but he feels the loss far more than you'd expect. He thinks it's due to Yamamoto and Brother, who embrace their own fighting styles with glee. Yamamoto with his sword, rules and honour code giving him the stability he craves, and Brother with his fists, relying on nothing but sheer raw power and technique.

Tsunade practices with knives, and can throw a punch and kick, but they never feel quite right. He wants â€" needs, something more. He wants flames.

He expresses this to his mother one day, while the two of them bond over an assassin that broke through Iemitsu's web of protection. He's strapped to the chair in the basement while Nana picks a knife and Tsunade experiments with scalpels. She doesn't really appear to pay attention, and Tsunade's heart isn't in the lesson.

The next day, Nana surprises him with some matches and a water bottle filled with kerosene.

It's not the soft orange flame he remembers, but his victims burn beautifully all the same.

\* \* \*

><p>Tsunade and Takeshi are ten, while Ryohei is twelve, when they finally make their first solo kill.<p>

It took a lot of planning, and a lot of research. Nana had suggested they start with one, but they dismissed it â€" Ryohei was getting tense, and there was no guarantee he would hold back enough for the others.

That narrowed the options down. Eventually, Tsunade received an envelope from Nana just before New Year. In it was the details of three small time criminal groups in their vicinity.

"The Hibari family intends to remove them in the next few weeks" she'd told him with a smile. "But I'm sure they won't mind if you clean one up for them."

Tsunade wonders how big a favour his mother must have promised for such a prize. He knows she's not happy about him doing this before he hits puberty â€" has only surrendered because of the two allies at his back, but this is far more than just accepting. He hugs her and thanks her profusely before calling his brother's in arms.

Eventually, they pick their target. A group just a stone's throw from Yamamoto's home.

They've been known to abuse and attack family members for debts that haven't been paid, and at least one woman has died under mysterious circumstances that couldn't be conclusively connected to one of their men. Yamamoto's eyes had gone hard at that, and Tsunade made a point to hand him said man's photo.

Ideally they would attack at night, but young children skulking around at night would draw too much attention. Instead they go in the early morning, where most will assume they're heading to school. They've staked out the house and memorised the blueprints, which was quite possibly the hardest part of the entire operation given that none of them are the study type.

This a small scale base considering the size of the organisation, but they're expecting approximately seven enemies. They've accepted two each for Yamamoto and Sasagawa since they fight close range. Tsuna's trio will be locked in a room and at the mercy of his flames â€" though Nana will be outside and watching to make sure everything goes as expected.

It doesn't, but really, none of them are surprised. It's their first after all.

To begin with, one of Sasagawa's catches him entering the room, forcing him to lunge at the man a lot sooner than planned. Thankfully, the boxer has always worked best with his back against the wall and adrenaline pumping in his veins. Yamamoto is caught off guard when one of his actually turns out to be a swordsman â€" he's never actually fought a swordsman trying to kill him, and he pays bitterly for it while trying to adjust.

As for Tsuna, the accelerant goes off as planned, but he hasn't properly accounted for the desperation of panicked adult men. The break down the door, and he's forced to get a lot closer to finish them off. One still burns, another passes from smoke, while the other finds their throat slit by one of Nana's knives when her son falters at the last step and finds himself with a hand clamped in his hair and his skull being smashed into a concrete wall.

When the dust clears, Yamamoto is bleeding, and Brother's arm is going to be sprained at least, and Tsuna's head hurts in a way that suggests going to sleep would be a bad idea.

But they're alive, and their opponents are not.

They return to the Sawada household with wide grins, and after tending to their injuries, Nana cooks them a celebratory breakfast.

\* \* \*

><p>The first opened the floodgates.<p>

Attacking one of the other two groups would have been suicide with the Hibari's holding control â€" and they were a little stumpedâ€|until Takeshi had suggested looking outside Namimori.

They can't risk going too far. At the end of the day they are still children and people notice when they walk around without an escort. Instead they rely on Nana and the Sasagawa's to take them on trips. Nana is perfectly aware of what they're doing and happy to work around them, so long as they get the okay for their targets from her first. The Sasagawa's however, have no idea that their charming family trips have such a dark secondary purpose, and that's how they want to keep it.

Takeshi humbly asks that they never ask his father to take them, and it's a request Tsuna happily abides to.

In their first year, they manage to rack up 6 hits, each of them hitting double digits in singular kills. It's a number they make a point to beat the next year, and once Ryohei makes it to Middle School, they use him as their 'escort' and take their business even further. Nowadays hits in Namimori are a last resort â€" it's Nana's hunting grounds entirely.

By the time the Middle School year is in full swing, the rumours in the underworld are starting to stir concerning 'The Children of Blood'. Tsuna thinks the title is rather beautiful in Japanese, but the underbelly of society seems fond of the English translation for its simplicity.

The Bloody Boys.

\* \* \*

><p>Hibari Kyouya had a very strict world view. The world was full of herbivores, but there was also a handful of carnivores. It was the job of the carnivores to watch the herbivores, and beat them into shape when they weren't obeying the rules.<p>

Crowding was their worst offence â€" herbivores mindlessly followed one another, regardless of how stupid the first herbivore was. They needed to be kept separate for their own good.

However, carnivores were a different matter. Especially the little lion and his pride.

He'd been aware of Tsunayoshi and his mother long before he'd ever been introduced. That family of carnivores had always resided in Namimori, picking off the handful of dangerous herbivores that slipped through the cracks while hiding in the shadows. As such, he hadn't expected the carnivore to matter much at all.

Except when Sawada Tsunayoshi finally entered Kyouya's den of Namimori Middle, he didn't come alone.

The crazy boxer who both frustrated and excited him had thrown himself at the boy, clearly old friends. And the tall teen who followed him, Yamamoto Takeshi, the rising star of the baseball team. The three of them looked perfectly harmless, until they herded together.

Then innocent eyes shifted, sharpened. Muscles tensed and there was a swagger in their step. Predators lifting off their sheepskins.

Within the first week of school, he'd fought all three of them separately. Yamamoto was definitely the most interesting â€" he wasn't there yet, but the teen was well on his way to growing real fangs. Sasagawa had been irritating long before his alpha showed up, but Sawadaâ€|

The scrap of fluff had no grace, and no muscle to really put power in his punches. But he certainly knew how to fight dirty. No real

technique or style â€" he would bite and scratch, splash the area with incendiaries, and when finally driven to bring out a weapon â€" he aimed to kill, not incapacitate.

There was a scar on his left side that still gave him a thrill when he spotted it from that fight. Another inch and he would have bled out on the roof before help could have reached him â€" vicious little carnivore. The prefect was 90% certain the first year hadn't followed through solely because he wanted Kyouya in his little pack rather than in the ground, foolish creature.

Still, he was looking forward to seeing just how dangerous he'd grow.

If that meant sometimes letting the three of them gather on the roof when he was there, so be it.

\* \* \*

><p>Sometimes, Nana watches her three boys and wonders how Tsuna got so lucky. She'd had her father to teach her the ropes, but had been well aware that she had to keep her nature tightly hidden. Tsuna, before he'd even hit puberty, had managed to collect a little family all of his own, almost without even trying. Hibari was no surprise â€" the Hibari's and her family had understood each other for decades, but to collect a budding assassin and adrenaline monster â€" both of whom came from relatively stable families â€" in the same small town? No matter what Yamamoto had seen or done, or how eager Sasagawa was, both shouldn't have been so eager to fall into Tsuna's steps as quickly as they did.<p>

Then she remembers Iemitsu, and how he'd almost seemed to shine when they were together. A burning flame in his eyes that had made her follow him anywhere, even down an aisle, whose very memory kept her faithful. That fire that Tsuna had inherited, and been locked awayâ€|but perhaps not as much as everyone thought.

She looks at her three boys, playing video games and acting as children should, and wonders if that flame that compels people to follow might not be so lost after all.

If nothing else, unlike her, she knows her son - light as dim as it is, will not be satisfied in the shadows.

\* \* \*

><p>There's a baby on her doorstep. There's not a killer in the world that doesn't know this creature.<p>

For the first time since she said yes to wearing his ring, Nana wishes she'd killed Iemitsu.

How dare he. HOW DARE HE.

He discarded Tsuna when he was a child. Handed her to Nana with a smile. Perhaps he hadn't known the full implications of that decision, but that didn't change the fact that Tsuna was HERS.

She slams the door in the baby's face, and grabs a knife from the kitchen.

"Tsunayoshi!" she yells, were aware that her son will be standing to attention from his full name. "No school today, we're going out."

A door won't stop Reborn, but hopefully she can get Tsuna alone and prepare him for the battle ahead.

\* \* \*

><p>Reborn is confused.<p>

When the Ninth sent him to Namimori, he'd had very clear expectations. A dim but well-meaning mother, and a completely pathetic no-good son that he had to carve into a Mafia boss. That's what his reports have promised him.

What he's received is something very different. The look in Nana's eyes weren't that of a civilian â€" there had been recognitionâ€|but no fear. Just a glimmer of anger as the door had slammed in his face, not even giving him a chance to introduce himself.

Within minutes, the Sawada's are leaving the house, and it's clear his future student is no less a surprise. His eyes wouldn't have looked out of place on the face of Nono's youngest son, which throws up a whole slew of additional problems.

He burns the files Iemitsu provided. Clearly the man is dumber than even Reborn had thought â€" his fairy-tale family in a faraway land are no more civilians than the Lion himself.

As such, he throws away his original plans to infiltrate the home, and instead does what he should have done in the first place â€" calling up local contacts and getting information on the Sawada family from those who actually live here rather than rely on the intel of a man who only visits twice a decade.

What comes back is a little unnerving. Even taking into account the proximity of the Hibari family, there's a distinct lack of criminal activity, not only in Namimori but the surrounding districts. Warnings sent to the highest in the underground of a family that is best left alone. Including a woman with brown hair and a far too vacant smile. Who has a son that likes to travel Japan with his best friends â€" often visiting places that end up on news reports the following evening.

A more thorough search of the house, complete with its real blueprints reveals the hidden basement, and Reborn prepares a new strategy.

In the evening, he is waiting on the porch, and when they return, he bows and politely requests an audience.

Killer to killer.

\* \* \*

><p>He'll give Iemitsu's wife credit. She might be as much a simple housewife as her husband is a construction worker, but she can make an excellent espresso.<p>

They're sitting in the living room, his future student sitting opposite him while his mother serves the drinks. She's also put a rather impressive carving knife on the tray " probably because her apron's pocket isn't very accessible when she sits.

To Reborn's surprise, Nana is the first to initiate the conversation.

"I assume you've come at the request of my husband" she says. "Despite his clear choice to keep Tsunayoshi out of the family."

"So, you did know," Reborn replies. "I wasn't certain."

The woman's eyes sharpen. "Mr. Arcobaleno, I assure you I knew exactly who I was marrying at the time. It's not my fault my husband didn't take the same precautions."

The hitman tenses at her choice of phrase. Not just any criminal knows about the Arcobaleno " and it's as much a threat as it is confirmation of how much this woman really knows"and how much he can reveal.

"Regardless" Nana continues. "Why has my husband and his boss changed their minds so suddenly?"

Reborn stores that information for a later date and returns to the original conversation. "Necessity. Originally, the Vongola Ninth had four possible heirs, so it was thought Tsunayoshi would never need to be considered. Unfortunately, over the last 8 years, three have died and another has proven to be ineligible. As such Vongola hired me to help train Tsuna into for the tenth position."

"Why am I even considered for the position anyway?" Tsuna argues. "Surely they have plenty of underbosses or something they can put in place?"

"The Vongola family can only be inherited by a direct blood relation of the first boss Giotto" Reborn explains. "When he retired to Japan, the family went to his cousin, whose line has been in power since. The Sawada family are related to first boss, and therefore legitimate candidates."

He turned his head and gave the teen a critical look. "I admit I was told to expect something far different. I certainly didn't expect to find the home base of the infamous 'Bloody Boys.'"

Tsuna snorts, clearly amused Reborn had made the connection. "I just bet you didn't. My father sees what he wants to see " neither of us have ever seen the point in explaining otherwise. Are you disappointed you didn't get a pathetic, no-good civilian to beat up?"

Reborn smirks back. "On the contrary. Bringing civilians in has always been a complicated process " you at least will not have any problems with the crime side of things, and you've already started gathering guardians. All I really need to do is unseal your flames."

Nana's eyes narrow at that vague statement, but Tsuna is already

shaking his head.

"Forget it. I've no interest in being a Mafia Boss. Get my Dad to do it."

Reborn ignores him. "Don't worry, I'll groom you into a perfect mafia boss."

Something flashes out of the corner of his eye, and he jerks back just in time to avoid the knife angled towards his face. By the time he's back in place, Nana has already hidden it out of site, the same vacant smile on her face.

"I believe my son made his opinion clear, as did Iemitsu ten years ago. He should take the position if there are no longer any from the second line."

Tsuna frowns as Reborn just shakes his head.

"I'm afraid that's not an option. Iemitsu is in charge of CEDEF, working as Vongola's independent advisor. In order to take the position, he had to officially remove himself from the line of succession."

The boy scowls. "How convenient. Well it still doesn't matter, I'm not becoming a mafia boss."

"I would think not" Nana sniffs, taking a drink herself. "Far too much paperwork and criminal operations â€" my son was born for far more important things."

Reborn raises an eyebrow. "Vongola is the most powerful mafia family in the world."

"Which should make it easy to find a bastard heir\_ somewhere\_ in the family tree" Nana replies. "That said, I would like more information on this flame sealing. You said you can unseal them?"

Tsuna's back straightens at her question, and Reborn nods.

Both of them smile.

"Then I think we can go along with this farce for a little while" Nana says.

\* \* \*

><p>The first week is as much a learning curve for Reborn as it is for Tsuna.<p>

It becomes clear very early on that neither Sawada take kindly to the 'M' word, and react violently when it's uttered, although to be fair, they've taken to attacking walls and furnishings after realising they haven't a hope in hell of actually hitting the Arcobaleno.

The same could be said for 'boss', but Sasagawa and Yamamoto, the remaining 'Bloody Boys' fall in love with the title and start using it in jest â€" so now Tsuna just rolls his eyes whenever Reborn uses it.



Safe topics include flame theory, fighting techniques (which if he's honest he hadn't thought he'd need for at least several months and had to frantically prepare on the first night) and basic tutoring. Sawada Tsunayoshi is a hopeless academic student, as are his friends, and although Nana clearly doesn't \_care\_, she's certainly not going to complain if her boys improve.

The Sasagawa's are happy to let Ryohei sit in on the tutoring sessions, and while Tsuyoshi Yamamoto goes pale when he sees Reborn "understandable given his history" his apparent acceptance of Tsunayoshi's presence in his son's life leaves him little ground to complain about Reborn's.

Speaking of the Sasagawa's, it turns out the boxer has a little sister, who seems quite charmed by Tsunayoshi's hapless klutz act. He considers trying to manipulate it, but one glance at Ryohei's clear and obvious affection for the girl makes him drop the idea. Ryohei is loyal, but suffers tunnel vision, and he really doesn't want to deal with the fallout should the boxer think someone is a threat to the baby bird he calls a sibling.

At least not outside of a controlled setting.

Unfortunately, his biggest issue is Dying Will Bullets. They're notoriously bad to use on people who enjoy killing "more often than not they go on a killing spree of both enemy and ally alike. But there's no easier way to start chipping away at the seal short of getting Nono to come here and do it himself.

(Although frankly, Reborn is rather frustrated the man hadn't thought to do just that and explain the situation himself. Clearly the man's grown fond of his grandfather act and wants to make sure all of 'civilian Tsunayoshi's' anger and resentment is aimed directly at Reborn rather than him. The man is in for a nasty surprise when he finally deigns to meet his new heir).

\* \* \*

><p>After a month of tiptoeing around the family, figuring out exactly where and what buttons he can push, he decides to try slipping at little more mafia into the mafia-less lessons before he has to send his first progress letter to Nono (and boy is <em>that</em> going to be fun). If Reborn succeeds in his mission, Tsuna will need a right hand man, and neither of his friends are really suitable given their 'technically' civilian status.

Bringing in a mafia born teen could end badly "there's no guarantee Tsuna won't just kill him and be done with it, so Reborn needs to make sure the candidate appeals to him on a personal level. Since Tsuna seems to like collecting broken killers, that seems like a good place to start.

Thankfully, he knows just the teen.

\* \* \*

><p>As Reborn and Gokudera converse, uttering some tripe about becoming an heir if he wins this fight, Tsuna just slips his hands into his pockets and eyes up his opponent.<p>

## The Smoking Bomb.

Admittedly, Tsuna's never actually gone up against someone who uses explosives, but if the teen is actually lighting them with cigarettes, he hardly thinks it'll be a challenge.

His hands had been twitching for accelerant the second his homeroom teacher introduced Gokudera Hayato. It had taken every ounce of self-restraint not to retaliate when the teen had kicked over his desk, letting his shoulders slump and laugh nervously like his classmates would expect. Since Reborn's arrival both Nana and Hibari had been digging through their contacts to keep an eye on Italian hitmen and assassins who might come to Japan — either to kill the future heir or help Reborn. The bomber had managed to make it pretty high on the list due to his age, and his history of trying to find a family to accept him.

For all the teens anger and bluster, Tsuna can all but feel the desperation oozing off the teen. It's the only thing stopping him from immediately slitting his throat.

He might clearly be a plant by Reborn, but he feels so much like Yamamoto and Sasagawa did when he first met them it almost hurts.

On the side-lines he can feel the swordsman and boxer standing guard. Yamamoto is grinning while Brother clearly wants to join in. He ignores them and focuses on his target, diving under the first wave of dynamite and digging out the water bottle hidden in his jacket. Gokudera barely has time to get his next batch in his arms before he feels the liquid splash over his arms and jacket, his nostrils thick with the scent of flammable agent. Instincts honed from years of handling dangerous chemicals are the only reason he doesn't jerk and allow the cigarette ash to fall.

He's carrying explosives, has lit cigarettes in his mouth, and he's now covered in accelerant.

Tsuna calmly walks over, plucks the dynamite from his hands and tosses it away—and holds one finger up next to the cigarette in Gokudera's mouth.

These cigarettes are designed to light fuses with ease. If the ash collecting on the end falls, Gokudera will burst into flames. If the burns don't get him, the several dozen sticks of dynamite he's still wearing on his person definitely will.

He can only stare at the Decimo candidate, so different from the fumbling boy he'd seen in class. This—can he really call him civilian? Those are the eyes of an experienced Mafioso, with no doubt or mercy to be found. This boy holds Gokudera's life in his hands, and the silver haired Mafioso doubts he sees any reason not to crush it.

But instead of tapping the ash and ending Gokudera's life, Tsuna's eyes narrow, and faster than Gokudera can follow, plucks the cigarette from his mouth and tosses it away from the accelerant soaked teen.

"Don't let Hibari catch you with those" Tsuna warns. "Smoking's not permitted on school grounds."

And with that, walks off, his two friends dropping into line beside him, laughing and joking "as if the smallest teen hadn't just been inches from killing his challenger.

Gokudera drops to his knees in shock.

Why didn't he?

\* \* \*

><p>The next day, Gokudera avoids him entirely, which causes almost as much commotion as when he'd furiously attacked the day previous. Yamamoto tries to keep an eye on him, but the teen is clearly not interested in repeating his failure.<p>

Tsuna decides to give him a few more days, and if he hasn't left Namimori or approached him to discuss the situation, he might have to take him out. Hibari might be willing to help out if he shows him the bombers rap sheep.

Reborn is also keeping away, probably unsure if his input will get the solution he wants. Tsuna has spotted him conversing with the bomber "probably explaining why he'd managed to be completely blindsided by a 'civilian.'

Thankfully, the problem solves itself. Gokudera approaches him on the second day, and after collecting Yamamoto and Brother, they find themselves watching the teen drop into a ridiculously low bow.

"Tenth!" he splutters. "I'll follow you forever."

Tsuna winces, and Ryohei starts cracking his knuckles. But before he can follow through, Gokudera jerks his head up and the look in his eyes makes them pause.

"Until the Vongola Ninth officially disinherits you, you are the Vongola tenth! But even if that happens, I will stay by your side!"

Tsuna rubs his temples, before walking over and crouching down next to him.

"Why? You're not like us. You're lonely " I can feel that, but you're not a killer at heart, it's just a means to an end for you, so why follow me? And don't just say 'because the loser serves the winner.' I'll kill you right now for such a stupid reason."

Gokudera swallows, but his eyes never falter.

"Because you didn't kill me when everybody else would have. Because you could tell I was lonely even when I was nothing but rage. You're right " I don't care about killing"but considering how crap this world is; I really don't care that people stay alive either!"

His hands have clenched into fists. "Perhaps it's not the best reason, but every instinct I have said you're a man I can follow, so please, let me do so!"

Tsuna sighs, and Gokudera's heart sinks. However, moments later the spiky haired teen is holding out his hand, and the bomber is speechless as he pulls him up.

"Don't ever call me Tenth" Tsuna warns him. "And if you ever betray me and mine, I'll kill you myself."

Gokudera can only grin.

From his position on the stairwell roof, Reborn pats Leon and wonders if he should be happy about this turn of events. It's not exactly how the hitman wanted the situation to go, but at the end of the day Tsuna has accepted Gokudera, so he's counting it as a win.

Now he just needs to figure out how to explain this to Nono " and oh what he wouldn't give to see the look on Iemitsu's face when he hears the news about his family's extracurricular activities"

\* \* \*

><p>Gokudera's a quick learner. Tsuna took a shot bringing him into the fold and telling him what the three of them do when nobody else sees. Ideally he would take the bomber on a hunting trip to see how he handles it, but Reborn is making that impossible right now. Although it takes him several hours and a good dozen right hooks from Ryohei to get him to start calling him 'Tsuna' instead of 'Tenth.'<p>

To his credit though, Gokudera barely bats an eye after learning how much blood the 'Bloody Boys' have spilled " instead musing out loud.

"It sounds like you'd be better placed in the Varia than the main family."

All three of them stop and turn.

"Varia?"

Gokudera falters at their confusion, but recovers with a grin.

"Yeah, they're pretty famous in the underground. They're Vongola's independent Assassination Squad. Every member has to be invited to join, and they're pretty much cream of the crop. The Varia don't even look at a mission unless it has an 80% success rate " and they don't fail."

"Why the hell is Tsuna only hearing about this now!?"

One by one, the three of them grin, and Tsuna can't help but laugh.

"You know what Gokudera, maybe the mafia will be a good fit for us after all."

After all, what self-respecting serial killer would want the title of tenth when you have assassination squad as an option?

\* \* \*

><p>There's a cow in the tree. Armed to the teeth and completely lacking in sanity.<p>

Although to be fair, he's also five years old and trying to kill Reborn (albeit without a hope in hell of succeeding) so Tsuna can't help but feel a kinship.

Apparently the brat's name is Lambo, and followed Reborn from Italy and wants to kill him to prove his worth to his family. Now, Tsuna can definitely understand rites of passage, but sending a five-year-old to kill someone like Reborn " with weapons that are apparently designed to be non-lethal (there is no way Lambo would still be alive after that many grenade blasts if they were military grade) suggests there's a little more to the story.

Unfortunately, he doesn't have time to question it " thanks to Reborn's explosive tutoring he's late for school, so he dumps the kid on his mother and heads off. Thanks to the unfortunate arrival of Hayato's sister, Lambo is pushed out of his mind entirely.

The woman is actively trying to kill him and has damaged his newest friend on an unacceptable level. He's already had to hold Brother and Yamamoto back twice " Hibari will not appreciate a corpse in Namimori Middle.

Instead, he calls his mother.

Anyone who threatens the boys is automatically 'hers' anyway.

\* \* \*

><p>When they get home, Reborn isn't there, while Nana is spoon feeding Lambo while showing him her collection of training knives. After they greet her, she explains that Lambo had left so early, his tutors hadn't really taught him how to use his equipment.<p>

"I thought since Tsu-kun is all grown up and has Reborn to help him, I might help Lambo" she explains, genuine delight on his face. "He's such a keen learner."

Judging from the look of utter adoration on Lambo's face, nothing short of death would separate him from Nana's side anyway. Tsuna actually doesn't mind " with Yamamoto and Brother keeping him company, his mother has been feeling a little lonely during the day, a new student would probably really help her out.

He would have expected Reborn to have an opinion on this, but oddly enough the Hitman isn't around. When Tsuna questions it, Nana's eyes sharpen.

"Oh, Reborn had to take his friend Bianchi to the hospital. The poor woman broke in to surprise him but tripped and fell onto my collection while I was cleaning them" she says, smile on her face while giving Lambo a blade to hold himself. "If Reborn hadn't shown up when he did it could have been a real disaster."

Considering the dark look on Reborn's face when he returns, he's well aware of that fact.

Bianchi never returns.

\* \* \*

><p>Reborn hadn't managed to confirm it, but he was 90% certain Iemitsu had orchestrated Lambo's arrival, knowing that his son would eventually need a good Lightning Guardian and the Bovino had been desperate for an alliance with the Vongola for years. Normally a child would be considered insulting, except for two things.<p>

One. Tsuna wouldn't be taking over for at least a decade " at which point the child would be of reasonable age and had the added bonus of having spent most of their life indoctrinated by their new family.

And two. The Bovino had provided him with the ultimate cheat code. The Ten Year Bazooka.

Unfortunately, the Ten Year Bazooka's appearance is the first time Reborn actually has genuine doubts about his ability to push Tsuna into the role of Decimo. He doesn't even remember the incident that caused the gun to pop out " Lambo had done something irritating, Reborn reacted, did it matter what? Either way, a purple bazooka flew out of the cow's afro, smoke appeared, and suddenly everyone was looking \_up\_ at the formerly pint-sized brat.

Some of that boundless energy has clearly drained off, with the teen holding a rather lazy slouch and disinterested eyes. But there's a twinkle in them that he keeps seeing on Tsuna and his friends, and more worryingly, the teen is wearing a long coat that hosts the Varia emblem.

Gokudera splutters at his appearance, but adult Lambo ignores him and smirks at Reborn, before pulling out a pair of horns"and gets pummelled into the ground without the hitman having to put up even a modicum of effort.

Nana puts cyanide in his espresso for a week after that, but at least Reborn knows some things won't change.

Oddly enough, when annoying-child-number-2 shows up and tries to kill Tsuna"she's surprisingly okay with it. Probably because A) she's not there for the actual event and B) Tsuna proves he's not morally against pounding little kids into the ground (is that a good thing or a bad thing). Once I-pin reveals her mission and the whole thing proves to be a misunderstanding, his student is congenial enough, and next thing you know, she's eating at the Sawada's. Nana's eyeing her up in a way that suggests problems (he does \_not\_ want to explain to Fon why his student is suddenly playing with knives), but all issues vanish once the stupid cow brings out the bazooka again. Her future as a normal girl seems to spare her from Nana's tutelage - she's not welcome at Lambo's lessons, and seems relatively oblivious to the actual nature of the family.

Annoying-but-at-least-potentially-useful-child-number-3 appears not long after, and although Reborn can't help but approve of Tsuna taking in the famous Ranking Fuuta, he's not entirely sure why. The boy has absolutely no interest in killing, and Tsuna doesn't appear interested in his rankings at all.

When questioned, Tsuna just shrugs and says he's always been bad at refusing requests, but the grin on his face does nothing but make Reborn suspicious.

He gets his answer when both Sawada's and their teenage group of psycho's head outside and cut off the men chasing Fuuta, quite literally.

Apparently Fuuta makes good bait.

\* \* \*

><p>â€|Unfortunately, the problem with using a human as bait is that the enemy can sometimes turn it around and use it against you. Two weeks later, Fuuta goes missing, and someone starts attacking students at Namimori middle.<p>

Hibari is spitting teeth at the blatant insult on his territory, and it's all Tsuna can do to hold him off long enough to promise he has nothing to do with it (he knows Hibari knows that, but the teen needs someone to blame until he has a better answer). It's not normally something he would concern himself with, but keeping Hibari on his good side is vital for the future, so he pulls in Yamamoto and Brother, and gets Gokudera to research possible enemies. His mother is staying out of it, since nobody has died and it's probably a spat between children. Tsuna has no intention of doing anything more than finding a culprit to sic Hibari on, but since Reborn has arrived, the Bloody Boys haven't been able to go on any trips, and this would be a good way to keep their scouting and surveillance skills sharp. Plus, he can finally see just how smart Gokudera really is.

However, before they can really get going, it suddenly becomes personal. Hibari gets the call that Ryohei is in the hospital, and although the teen is bandaged head to toe, and yelling about getting that guy's punch in his club, there's no hiding the fire in his eyes.

Brother had been on the edge, and he'd still lost. This isn't a schoolyard brawl, whoever's doing this is a professional. Yamamoto's eyes sharpen and Tsuna grits his teeth. This needs to end right now. Finding out the attackers are going after the strongest fighters gives them a motive, and Tsuna has never been so grateful he's been keeping Gokudera indoors when he spots him in ranking number 4 and 3 respectively.

Thankfully, Gokudera comes through â€" the culprits are from Kokuyo, and hiding out at the old Kokuyo Land site.

Any lingering doubts Tsuna had about bringing Gokudera into the fold are finally quashed when it comes to planning the attack.

He'd already known the teen was smart, but not to the extent of being a full blown genius. Within hours of ordering him to retrieve any information possible, Gokudera had returned with blueprints, ownership deeds, statistical analysis on the most likely areas of decay and the most likely entrances and exits that could be used by them or their enemy. He'd even highlighted which area would be best suited for each of the quartet to fight in â€" it was an information smorgasbord that would have taken Tsuna and his mother weeks to

collect.

With skills like that, Tsuna was astonished a mafia family hadn't snapped him up. It really was too bad Gokudera wasn't actually a proper candidate â€" the Vongola could certainly do worse.

Speaking of Vongola, Reborn â€" who had been suspiciously absent recently â€" comes with news of a prison break with mafia ties. Rokudo Mukuro â€" the name on all of Gokudera's reports â€" is responsible, and the Ninth has sent a letter, ordering Tsuna to apprehend him.

The audacity of the request almost has Tsuna refusing on principal, but Brother is hurt and Hibari has gone missing. Even his mother is considering following him, but is convinced to stay and take care of Brother, who despite very vocal protests, is in no condition to move. It's rather sad they can't wait for him to heal â€" Tsuna and Yamamoto's codes prevents them from killing unless their opponents are murderers or worse. And since Gokudera's admitted getting the criminal records out of Vendicare would just be slightly less difficult than breaking into NORAD, they actually don't know if they can go all out. Tsuna has always been a little more...flexible than Yamamoto on that rule, but it's still a major disadvantage. They'll have to use their own judgement or rely on Gokudera for the finishing blow.

\* \* \*

><p>Their infiltration sadly doesn't fully go to plan. Along the way they get ambushed, and both Yamamoto and Gokudera find themselves taking on Kokuyo students. The animal boy doesn't stand a chance against Yamamoto once the swordsman discovers he was the one who attacked Ryohei, while the Yo-yo boy only escapes by aiming at Tsuna and forcing Gokudera to take the blow. He seems horrified at the incident, and feels it necessary to take on the girl with a vibrating clarinet to redeem himself. Tsuna leaves him to it as he's distracted by some idiot with a collection of canaries who tries to threaten Kyoko â€" but that just has Yamamoto and Tsuna bursting into laughter. Moments later, Nana and Adult Lambo are on the scene and Tsuna is free to burn Birds to ash, the first fatality of the day. He'd threatened Kyoko. Frankly, Tsuna was doing him a <em>favour</em> considering what Kyoko's actual brother would have done if he found out.

Fuuta appears after that, and Tsuna's relief is only tainted by the fear on Fuuta's face. He doesn't know what Mukuro has done to easily the most innocent of his family, but he's going to make him regret it. Unfortunately, he can't tell the boy that, because the man in question appears before them.

He's playing pretend, but Tsuna has spent years trying to spot monsters in plain sight. The teenager before him doesn't look anything like the photo, but he reeks of danger â€" if this guy isn't the ringleader, he's not sure he actually wants to meet him. When Tsuna makes it clear he isn't buying it, he drops the act â€" revealing the strange eye underneath blue hair.

Behind him, he can hear the other's fighting, but his focus is the threat ahead of him. He tosses kerosene into the trees and arcs it towards the teen, who's clearly caught off guard. The forest burns,



but the teenager does something with his red eye and vanishes.

Tsuna flees the forest and comes across the others fighting the 'real' Rokudo Mukuro. It appears his original instinct was dead on "this guy is definitely dangerous, but he's broken and miserable. There's no way he instigated a prison break.

Regardless, he's left Yamamoto unconscious and bleeding, and that. Is not. Acceptable. Unfortunately, Gokudera fills him in on the man's weapon, and he's also not sure what he can do against a giant steel ball that uses wind currents. Fire is useless, and there's no way he can get close enough to use fists or knives with a significant speed boost.

'Rokudo Mukuro' seems to know this too.

"You need to abandon your hope" he said. "You do not have the strength to beat me."

Tsuna scowls. "Just because you're stronger doesn't mean I don't have strength. Mine just comes in the form of a genius."

Before his opponent can process that statement, Gokudera has thrown his tiny dynamite, and Tsuna is using the blast to speed forwards, mindless of the pain in his back. The man can't react in time, and Tsuna punches him straight in the face while his other hand aims a knife at his jugular.

It misses, but only just.

The man then goes on the offensive, and doesn't hold back "Brother would love him. But there's something wrong with how he moves" for all his bluster he doesn't want to kill Tsuna.

He can't help but call him out on it, and when his next hit rips open his arm, rendering it useless and in desperate need of medical attention, he finally gets through to him.

Turns out the man might be a hitman, but the crime that got him landed in Vendicare wasn't even committed by him. He's little more than a slave of Rokudo Mukuro.

This. This is why he didn't want to get involved with the mafia. All these undercover plots and underhanded murder methods "give him a perfectly normal murderer, paedophile or yakuza grunt any day. How the hell are you supposed to figure out who's actually the enemy with all this scamming going on?

Either way, actually killing doesn't seem right, and the man Lanchia, tries to warn Tsuna of Mukuro's plan, only for the thrice damned yo-yo teen to reappear and take him out before he can finish. The poison might have an antidote, but Tsuna honestly doesn't care, he just wants Mukuro and the yo-yo guy dead. Gokudera is very happy to oblige for the second, and when the bastard shows up again, Tsuna doesn't even look back, leaving the Italians to their fight and heading upwards.

Reborn walks by his side, a curious look in his eye.

"Tell me Tsuna, if you were to die right now, what would you

regret most?"

Tsuna glances over at the hitman. "That's a rather specific question."

The hitman smiles. "Humour me."

His student's eyes narrow, and he turns to glare up at the stairway hiding his future opponent.

"Honestly? It would be not getting to see Mukuro scream while I incinerate his limbs one by one."

Reborn aims his gun.

"I guess that'll work."

Tsuna barely has any time to register the words before the Dying Will Bullet penetrates his brain.

And the world bursts into beautiful orange flame.

\* \* \*

><p>Sawada Tsunayoshi is a rather terrifying human being.<p>

Ranking Fuuta had warned him. His own men had warned him, hell, even the prefect he'd had the pleasure of tormenting had warned him, but he'd been arrogant. He'd assumed there was nothing any mere mortal could do to stop him.

He was bitterly regretting not having taken more precautions now.

For one thing, the entire building was currently on fire, and the smoke was hindering his eyes and lungs. Secondly, the teen didn't fight so much like a Mafioso as he did a wild dog. He'd all but stormed in on all fours, naked save for a pair of boxer shorts, a burning flame on his head and knives in his hands.

His grin had been impossibly wide, and the look in his eyes had even given Mukuro pause.

Ironically, the rabid creature fought like he was possessed (and that would have been far more amusing had it not made it so much harder to put him down), and although he couldn't differentiate between Mukuro's illusions, the way he moved and acted suggested the teen just didn't care. Spilling blood just made him grin even wider.

He couldn't even surrender and use the possession bullet "because he was pretty certain Sawada Tsunayoshi didn't understand surrender in his current state. All he could do was try and endure until the bullet "because this could only be caused by Vongola's infamous Dying Will Bullets "wore off and turned Tsunayoshi back into a rational psychopath.

Unfortunately, Tsunayoshi doesn't give him that opportunity, and he has just enough time to register the demon lunging for him before his world explodes into pain and darkness.

\* \* \*

><p>It's official. Tsuna <strong>hates</strong> the Vindice.

Once the Dying Will bullet wears off, Tsuna's a little pissed off that Reborn hit him, but the soft burn in the back of his head allows him to forgive the act. The seal is definitely breaking, and the boost resulted in the battered and bleeding body underneath him. Apparently he'd had just enough control to hold off killing the teen. Now he could actually enjoy the act.

He smiles, and picks up his favourite knife to finish off the jobâ€|

Reborn, watching from the side-lines, tenses up.

"Tsunas! Dont't! The Ninth ordered you to take him alive."

The boy ignores him, angles the knife-

-Only for thick chains to wrap themselves around his prey and yank him into the darkness.

"Hey!" Tsuna yells. "That's my prey!"

He makes to follow, only for Reborn to leap up and kick him back.

"Don't be stupid Tsuna" he warns. "Have you ever heard of the Vindice?"

The name is enough to make him freeze. His mother has mentioned them more than once, the bogeyman of the underworld. Going against them is signing your own death warrant.

Doesn't stop him from gritting his teeth and wanting to follow.

\* \* \*

><p>A week later, Brother is being released, and Gokudera arrives at the party with Mukuro's backstory, fresh from his contacts in Italy.<p>

Normally, Tsuna doesn't care what his opponent's motives are. At the end of the day killing is killing â€" he doesn't make excuses for what he does, if he gets caught he's not going to try and justify it. However, the mafia destroying Mukuro's family to the point where they break and experiment on children, resulting in Mukuro himself taking them out explains \_a lot.\_ At least Mukuro hadn't pretended he was trying to do the 'right' thing â€" he'd embraced the monster title with glee.

It's kind of a pity really. Admittedly, Mukuro had no real code when it came to killing, and he was now paying the price for it â€" but as far as Tsuna could tell, until he came to Namimori, every single one of his victims was a criminal. They might have been killed in rather horrific ways, but that just proves his fellow serial killer was creative. He'd even had Gokudera look to confirm, and there were no civilians in his body count â€" GBH perhaps, but no deaths. Frankly, if it hadn't been for Mukuro's attempts to kill his friends and the

rather creepy plan to possess him and rule the mafia in his place, Tsuna actually thinks they could have been friends. He's never hunted with an illusionist â€" it could have been fun.

Oh well, no point in regretting what might have been.

\* \* \*

><p>Reborn thought it would take at least several more shots with the Dying Will bullet before Tsuna started being able to focus his flame, but after the fight with Mukuro, he noticed the teens eyes glimmering orange on more than one occasion.<p>

The teen knew the fire was locked away, and had probably been chipping away at the seal subconsciously for years. One shot had temporarily released them, and Tsuna had clung to them with terrifying fervour.

There was still some way to go before he was fully free, but considering how dangerous the boy had been the first time, Reborn was going to have to be very careful with just when and where he chose to fire.

Unfortunately, he didn't have time to figure that out, because the next missive from Nono holds information Reborn really didn't need to hear right now.

Xanxus is free. The Vongola rings are heading to Namimori.

And the Varia are in close pursuit.

\* \* \*

><p>Tsuna is rather dismayed when the second-in-command of the Varia shows up. They'd gotten word he was entering the country, but his actual appearance catches them off guard and they really don't give the best first impression.<p>

For all Gokudera tries, Reborn has put an information block on Vongola information â€" so they have no idea why the Varia are in Namimori, and so when the little Rain flame shows up with archaic Japanese and a wooden box, Tsuna hasn't got the slightest idea what he's carrying.

But he does know that the Varia clearly want him, so all four of them descend upon the boy with an intent to give their future colleague quite a show.

The poor boy clearly doesn't understand what's going on when the boy he refers to as 'Lord' (and just what is with that?) throws accelerant in his direction, but from the ease he handles Yamamoto and Gokudera, knocking both into walls with little effort, he's no pushover. His biggest weak point is a box he refuses to let go of, and clearly the swordsman's target.

When it's finally forced from his hands, it's shoved into Tsuna's while the boy collapses from his injuries, and Reborn suddenly returns to the scene.

"He will kill anyone who gets in the way of him obtaining that box"

Reborn warns him, and Tsuna shrugs.

"What's wrong with that?" he asks. "I'm not going to keep them from him."

"Even if he kills you to eliminate witnesses?" Reborn replies, and Tsuna's eyes narrow. That's actually a good point.

"Voi!" the Varia officer screams. "Hand them over brat and I'll make it quick!"

He lunges for Tsuna, and he can only grin, going for a knife.

Only for Reborn to hit him with a bullet first.

\* \* \*

><p>When Tsuna comes to, he vaguely remembers fighting the swordsman and getting repeatedly pounded into the building for his trouble, while the rings are gone and a man with a whip surrounded by hitmen is on the scene. Turns out his name is Dino, Reborn's former student and currently allied with the Vongola and the holder of the real Vongola rings.<p>

The boy " Basil apparently " doesn't seem to know what to make of Tsuna. He'd been told to get the rings to Tsuna as if death itself was on his heels (and considering who had been chasing him, it was a rather apt description). Discovering the rings he's been protecting are not only fake, but that Tsuna had fully intended on handing them over before Reborn removed his higher mental faculties has clearly broken something inside him.

When it turns out said rings were actually fakes, Tsuna actually feels a little sorry for him. Though it's quickly huddled at the back of his mind when he realises it means "he's" given the Varia fakes. Talk about bad first impressions.

Apparently, the other new arrival to town is his Dad. Who gave Dino the rings because he has a prior engagement with his wife|

\* \* \*

><p>Iemitsu stood at the doorway of his home, trying to pinpoint exactly when everything went so wrong.<p>

Last year everything had been perfect. There were no obvious plots against the Vongola, Massimo was being groomed to take over after Federico's unfortunate demise, and his happy family were perfectly safe in Namimori.

Now? The Vongola was in shambles, Xanxus was on the move, he'd been forced to bring his little Tuna-fish into the family, and as an added bonus? His perfect little family had been nothing but a giant lie " he'd become the laughing stock of Vongola, the CEDEF commander who was in charge of dealing with threats to the Vongola hadn't been able to identify his own wife and child were psychopathic killers. Lal hadn't stopped yelling at him. Basil was in critical condition, and Nono wasn't taking his calls.

At least one of those problems he can deal with right now, as he

storms up the steps of his home and slams open the door.

Nana is preparing dinner, cutting vegetables while she lets Lambo try carving up the chicken (he's still a little over eager and places and not quite getting all the meat off the bones, but he's certainly an enthusiastic learner) while I-Pin and Fuuta play upstairs, when she hears the front door open.

Lambo looks up as a man dressed in orange overalls storms into the kitchen. Nana turns and faces her husband, whose face could have been carved out of stone.

His eyes however, are filled with hurt and betrayal, and Nana can't help but smile.

"oh don't look at me like that darling" Nana sing-songed, a knife held up near her face and glinting in the light. "After all, you lied too.

\* \* \*

><p>When he gets a text from his mother, Tsuna picks up Lambo, I-Pin and Fuuta and decides to sleep at a hotel that night.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Despite Tsuna's insistence that they really don't need to fight, there's going to be a battle for the right to lead. And they've no choice but to go along with it. Reborn's even brought in his former student to help train, despite his clear reluctance to let Dino anywhere near Tsuna up until this moment. That's probably why he's given him Hibari " oddly enough the safest of Tsuna's group.<p>

Yamamoto is going back to his Dad, while Gokudera is calling up an old tutor and friend of Reborn's. The baby hitman's also enlisted yet another arcobaleno to help with Ryohei"only the teen has vanished without a trace (Tsuna has no intention of telling him the boxer's headed for underground fight clubs to get his blood pumping). Lambo" is going to be a problem, and they have no idea who's in charge of mist. As for Tsuna, after only 2 Dying Will Bullets, he apparently needs to speed up his training, and will be working with Basil and Reborn until the very last match.

Tsuna wonders what the hell poor Basil had done to deserve that.

\* \* \*

><p>The first match is considered a roaring success " at least by Tsuna and his Guardians.<p>

By some miracle, none of the Varia appeared to be aware of just who Tsuna, Ryohei and Yamamoto were in the underworld, and Lussuria is completely blindsided when his attempt to freak out Ryohei with necrophilia innuendoes is met with an equally gushing admiration of his work. Tsuna had managed to wheedle out some of the Varia mission highlights from Reborn and Ryohei had gone positively starry-eyed at the Sun Officer's penchant for blood and gore with nothing but his hands and feet.

You could have knocked the man over with a feather when Ryohei introduces himself as a 'Bloody Boy' (and judging from the number of dropped jaws on the Varia side, he wasn't the only one) and the entire battle has to be postponed for at least five minutes while the two hand to hand fighters swap notes and become immediate best buds. Only Xanxus and Reborn both shooting into the ring brings them both back to reality.

The Varia immediately prove they're not taking any chances, flooding the ring with light and blinding Ryohei. The boxer is rather angry that his fight's been fixed, and shows his frustration by letting Lussuria kick him onceâ€|only to clamp on with one hand and use it to jump up and punch him straight in the face. It's nowhere near a good shot, but does manage to smash the sunglasses on the assassins face to pieces. Before Lussuria can recover from the lights, the teen is on him like a wild animal, smile feral and eyes wide. He gets in a good several shots before Lussuria hooks a leg around his torso and throws him into the bars.

It sort of descends into less of a match and more of an all-out brawl. Lussuria is not happy about getting whacked in the face and Ryohei is screaming about Extreme lights and both seem to have forgotten that they actually have short range skill sets. It takes a few more bullets for Lussuria to focus, but his loss is ensured when Tsuna realises Kyoko has entered the school.

Ryohei's eyes go wide, and Lussuria barely has any time to register the change before a punch shatters his kneecapâ€|and the teen goes for his unarmed leg.

By the time Kyoko has reached them, Ryohei is out and spouting some nonsense about a sumo tournament while Gokudera shoves some dynamite smokescreen up so she doesn't see the bloody mess her brother's left in his victory. He's about 70% certain the man is still breathing...but the way Ryohei had been going, he doubts Lussuria's actually happy about that.

So, Tsuna has the first full ring, and has guaranteed the other Varia will treat them as a threat â€" couldn't have gotten a better result if he'd tried.

\* \* \*

><p>The last time Xanxus was this blindsided, he committed a coup against the man he called father.<p>

The brat in line for the Tenth position was supposed to be a civilian. Every single report Mammon had managed to smuggle out of CEDEF said that Iemitsu's brat was a wet behind the ears kid with no redeeming features. He came expecting to fight a bunch of children living a fantasy.

What he's gotten is an actual fight.

He's never really heard of 'The Bloody Boys' â€" they debuted while he wasâ€|indisposed, but the trash-prince and the trash-shark are getting him up to speed. A group of young boys â€" sources argued on the number â€" who had wiped out significant players in Japan, forcing a lot of larger crime families to move out of the general area as a precaution. One was definitely a swordsman, while another

had a penchant for fire, but that was all they really knew. They were vicious and unpredictable, and as an added bonus, couldn't be bought. Nobody could find a record of money changing hands â€" anyone who profited from the deaths, did so through sheer fortune.

Just before the Varia had managed to get Xanxus loose, there had been debates on inviting them into the Varia should they actually track them down. Irony at its finest.

Well, his men would just have to get their act together and show them the difference between an amateur and **\*\*quality\*\***. Screw the done deal with the Cloud battle, he was not going to let some upstart brats think they had a chance against the elite!

It does make him smile though, when he recognises the dark look in Sawada Tsunayoshi's eye. He sees it in the mirror almost every day. How horrified his 'father' must have been, to realise his choice for a peaceful heir was just as twisted as his charity case son.

\* \* \*

><p>Sun had gone as expected, but Lightning is not something any of them are looking forward to. Tsuna only realises somewhere in between learning how to control the Hyper Dying Will mode and perfecting the chemicals that'll really make the flames 'pop' that his 'lightning' is little more than a toddler. Lambo has only just started learning from Nana, and his current skillset is woefully unprepared. The only real option is to let adult Lambo handle it, but Nana summons Tsuna to the basement and makes it perfectly clear that her student is not to enter the battle until she herself knows he can handle it.<p>

Five minutes and one bazooka trip later, she's still not convinced, and tells Tsuna that son or not, if he puts Lambo through that challenge, she'll kill him herself.

Reborn is not happy. Iemitsu is furious. Tsuna honestly doesn't care, and heads to the roof with Yamamoto, Ryohei and Gokudera to hand over the ring. He also pickpockets Basil and steals some of his HDW pills just in case Xanxus and the Varia reacted badly.

Arriving only to find Iemitsu and Reborn are already there with Lambo fills them with utter horror and rage.

"Lambo!" Tsuna shrieks. "Mother told you not to fight!"

"But Lambo can do it!" he insists. "The Great Lambo is strong enough to fight these jerks!"

"See, Lambo's fine" Iemitsu insists with the same dorky grin that makes Tsuna itch for blades. "What kind of man backs out of a fight without even trying."

Every fist is clenched, and Tsuna can only think of how his mother will react when she finds out. Most likely, she's going to be widowed by the end of the month.

The stupid Cervello are indifferent to Tsuna's clear protests regarding Lambo, but at least knows Lambo can't set foot inside without his half of the ringâ€|



“Which Iemitsu is putting around his neck. What?

The one in his pocket is a fake. Goddammit.

The Cervello start the match, and Iemitsu is on Tsuna, pinning down his arms to stop him from running in and yanking Lambo out, clearly unaware that if Lambo gets hurt \_they are all dead family or not!\_

Lambo takes one jolt and freaks out, and Tsuna starts mentally preparing his funeral. But when Lambo uses the ten year bazooka, it becomes a problem for everybody.

Because in their panic, they'd forgotten that Adult Lambo wears \_the Varia uniform“|\_

If Ryohei and Lussuria had Xanxus and his men on edge, it was nothing compared to this. Squalo's mouth almost reached the floor while the blonde goth kid did an impressive double take and shriek“|or maybe that came from the Arcobaleno on his head.

On their side, Iemitsu gapes, and the shock is enough to free Tsuna from his grasp.

Adult Lambo takes one look at the situation, and turns to look at Tsuna.

"Mama is going to be so pissed at you big brother."

Tsuna hangs his head. "Tell me about it. Can you just forfeit and save me the coffin bill?"

The other teen grins. "Boss, look at what I'm wearing and think how I'll answer that."

Tsuna sighs, and Lambo plants some horns on his head, throwing himself at Levi.

Sadly, the teen is hopelessly outclassed, and barely holds his own before the bazooka's time limit cuts in and replaces him with the much smaller and far more fragile normal Lambo.

Before the electricity can touch him, Tsuna is swallowing a pill and flying into the ring, tossing the boy towards Gokudera's arms and jumping onto a pylon out of the way of the shock.

"You win this round" Tsuna admits, holding up the ring he took from Lambo and tossing it in Levi's direction.

The Cervello however, don't take it so easily, and insist on the Sky ring being given to Xanxus as a penalty. Tsuna honestly doesn't care, and hey, maybe it'll make things easier later on.

Iemitsu on the other hand, is furious. Though it's hard to say if it's for Lambo not sticking to his plan (apparently the boy was supposed to fire the bazooka twice), or the fact that nobody mentioned Lambo's future alliance. He seems to be of the impression that Lambo threw the fight for his future boss “ Xanxus.

â€|The stupidity of this man never fails to astonish him.

Afterwards, Reborn rushes him off for yet more training, and considering Lambo's going home with a split lip and minor shock burns, for the first time Tsuna is grateful. Anything to hold off returning home.

\* \* \*

><p>The next day Basil comes to training looking a little pale, and mentions how his 'boss' will be absent from the next few battles while he recovers from an accident. Tsuna's rather impressed despite himself.<p>

If the man actually survived his mother's reaction, he must be a lot stronger than Tsuna thought...

\* \* \*

><p>The battle for the Storm Ring isâ€|illuminating, for a lot of people.<p>

Gokudera, for all he follows Tsuna like a puppy, is clearly desperate to prove he can be just as ruthless as Tsuna's older friends. Even to the point that he's brought in Shamal, an assassin even Nana has heard of (and even requested Tsuna get his autograph if the opportunity appeared) despite his clear dislike of the man. To his credit, the payoff was worth it â€" his dynamite are ten times more deadly now.

Unfortunately, his opponent is just as smart as he is, and ten times as bloodthirsty â€" Belphegor is showing off as much as he is. If what the arcobaleno of the group is saying is true, the teen is supposedly a fan of the Bloody Boys â€" even has some of their more impressive kills posterred on his bedroom wall â€" and is not happy he's getting stuck with the 'newbie.'

Instead of blood, this is a battle of the minds â€" and although Gokudera wins, he's left fighting for the ring, a chance of escape ticking away with every second. When Tsuna orders him out, it's clear he wants to disobey. When he stumbles out of the smoke, he drops to the ground and can't meet their eyes.

But suddenly Tsuna's hand is in his hair, brushing it away, and he looks up to see his boss smiling.

"This group has enough killers and death seekers Gokudera" he says. "We can't afford to lose your brain just yet."

He smiles, and manages to spit out a warning to the stupid sword freak before passing out.

\* \* \*

><p>Rain is by far the most important battle. It's the Varia's second in command against The Bloody Boy's most technically skilled member. Ryohei had proven himself, Lambo hadâ€|well, Lambo had at least shown where his alliance would one day be, and Gokudera had only lost on a technicality and <em>everyone <em>knows it. Now it was Yamamoto's

turn to prove himself. Tsuna had no clue who Iemitsu had roped in for his Mist, and Kyouya was only around to make up numbers. This match was their last chance to shine before the Sky battle.

Squalo actually seemed excited, if a little wild in the eye for their fight. It's a good match for Tsuna's swordsman - Yamamoto hasn't taken his hand off his sword for hours.

The Varia's second starts by foolishly toying with Yamamoto, testing him out to see just how good the 'brat' really is. Yamamoto takes advantage of it, almost taking the man's hand off - unfortunately, when Yamamoto brings out the fifth form, Early Summer Rain, a trick that's ended several lives, he learns the difference between skill and 'quality.' Squalo knows Shigure Souen, and that's taken the rain's job from difficult to damn near impossible.

It's a good thing Yamamoto has the best reflexes out of all Tsuna's allies combined, because he needs every inch of them to keep up with the Sword Emperor. Tsuna's actually starting to think Squalo's going to kill off the teen just to keep the Varia on top - when he mentions Autumn Rain, a form Yamamoto has never used, and judging from his expression, doesn't know.

Yamamoto figures it out before Tsuna does, and Squalo gets blindsided, flying through the air with his chest sliced in two. The look on his face is glorious.

It doesn't last much longer - Squalo's nursing a grievous wound and letting rage take over. Takeshi on the other hand, fully embraces the location and pulls off a brand new move. He swaps the sword at the last minute, hitting the man with the back of the blade, knocking him out instead of slicing his head clean off.

Makes sense - none of Tsuna's team had planned to kill the assassins, it might put their future careers in jeopardy if they take out someone Xanxus actually needs for the Vongola. Second in command most definitely.

Besides, the shark Yamamoto is currently fleeing from will quite happily do the job for him.

\* \* \*

><p>Mukuro.<p>

Only his Dad would think hiring the guy who wanted to possess his body and was still technically in jail as his Guardian would be a good idea.

Well, okay, technically he hired this girl Tsuna had never met, who as far as he could tell might as well have been grown in a lab for the express purpose of being Mukuro's body, but this was hardly the time to be quibbling over technicalities.

At least she - he. Tsuna's side won! The particulars of just who and how didn't really matter. Now they just need Hibari to show up, beat up the robot and then they could get on to the really fun part -

\* \* \*

><p>Huh.<p>

Well, all things considered, Tsuna probably should have seen this coming. Varia were the best â€" they didn't lose, and they sure as hell didn't leave things to chance. He should have realised things were going too smoothly.

Hibari performed as expected â€" quite frankly he seemed a little miffed at being given a robot for his opponent, so going straight for Xanxus once the Gola Mosca was on the ground was kind of expected.

The man inside the Moscaâ€|not so much.

To be honest, Tsuna wasn't entirely sure how they were supposed to take this. He supposed if he had really wanted the title of tenth, they'd be in troubleâ€|as it was, would killing the Vongola Ninth actually put him in better shoes with Xanxus?

Reborn probably uses that stupid mind reading trick and quickly removes that option, getting the Ninth out of the machine and off to hospital, while Tsuna and the others try to figure out what they're supposed to do next.

And how to pull off their final performance.

\* \* \*

><p>The poison is a lousy move.<p>

But other than that, everything goes well.

Right up until Xanxus gets the rings and it doesn't.

\* \* \*

><p>Squalo had barely finished his speech over the speakers when Tsuna's own voice roared across grounds.<p>

"Are you FUCKING KIDDING ME!"

Xanxus, Mammon and Bel can't help but look up, the fury of the voice only matched by the heat of the flames coming from the teen they'd thought was down for the count.

Clearly he'd not been as damaged as they thought, or had one hell of a recovery time, but Sawada was on his feet, storming towards them with spitfire in his eyes.

"All this chaos, all this scheming, all these plans" he hisses. "And it turns out you're not even eligible? Fuck that!"

His rage helped light a fire in Xanxus's own defeated eyes, and he pulled himself up to glare at the teen.

"You think I don't fucking know that trash?" he yells back. "I had to at least try! Punk trash like you has no right thinking he can lead Vongola!"

"You idiot! I don't want to be the Vongola Tenth!" Tsuna shrieks, throwing his hands in the air. "I want to be the Varia boss you idiots!"

Whatever Xanxus had been planning to say died in his mouth, while Bel's mouth dropped open as the teen started pacing in front of them, arms apparently trying to strangle the air in front of him. It's the most vocal the boy's been throughout the ring battle.

"It was so simple! We'd fight for the rings, we'd put up a good fight just to show how good we were, let you get them all at the last minute, achieve the inheritance, and BOOM! Swear loyalty to you and yours as Varia officers. It was perfect â€" and now you're telling me that after all this I'm still stuck with that thrice damned job?"

"Mah Squalo" Yamamoto moaned to the sky, "You couldn't have warned us? Tsuna's going to be impossible to deal with now."

Suddenly, Tsuna paused in his pacing, seemingly coming to a decision, and he stormed over, plucking the Sky ring from the ground.

"The way I see it, we have two options. One, I accept that I'm not getting out of this and wear this stupid thing, or-"

His grin was malicious as the fire in his hands flared to searing heats, and from the stands, the bystanders all paled.

"Tsuna!" Reborn yelled. "Don't you dare-"

The teen ignored him, and crushed the ring in his fingers â€" the shattered rock falling to the ground while the metal crumbled to dust.

"-Or we destroy it, tell everyone it didn't survive the fight AFTER it declared you the heir, and kill everyone here who disagrees" he finishes, a perfectly innocent smile on his face.

For a moment, everyone stood frozen, gaping at the scattered pieces on the ground, before it broken by the sound of harsh, hysterical laughter.

Belphegor and Mammon both jerked back as Xanxus collapsed to the ground, clutching his stomach in hysterics.

"I totally misjudged you Trash!" he hollered, his own grin a manic match for Tsuna. "I think you and I can get along."

"W-wait" one of the Cervello argued. "We need to discuss what just-"

Her remaining words were lost as something sliced down her back, and she dropped to the ground. Behind her, Yamamoto sheathed his sword while Sasagawa punched the remaining judge to the ground.

"I'll extremely try to make this quick!" he yelled between punches, watching the face cave under its mask.

"Sounds like a plan Tsuna" Yamamoto said with a grin, and glanced in the direction of the spectators. "All the other witnesses are locked

up right now, what should we do?"

Gokudera, who was busy ignoring the still hysterical Xanxus and collecting up the remaining rings for disposal, glanced Tsuna's way.

"Boss, I couldn't care less about that stupid horse, but Iâ€|do kind of owe Shamal."

It was said with a wince, and he ducked his head, and Tsuna just chuckled.

"Don't worry Gokudera" he said, glancing over at Xanxus â€" who was starting to recover and getting to his feet with help from Belphegor (who honestly looked as if he'd given up trying to understand what was going on). "So long as they're willing to go along, we won't have to take them to the basement."

"Basement?" Belphegor asked.

"Keh, get the feeling you're better off not asking Trash" Xanxus muttered, though the smirk hadn't left his face. "Let's go see the scum."

"Oh, we're extremely going?" Sasagawa asked, scrambling off the Cervello's corpse and wiping the blood off on his shirt. Chrome quickly stepped to his side and handed him a handkerchief to wipe his hands as she fell in line.

As it turned out, there was no need, as Squalo's laughter shrieked through the courtyard, quickly followed by a crash â€" as if someone had fallen out of a wheelchair.

"I'm good!" Shamal's voice yelped. "Xanxus is the Tenth! No problem here!"

"Uhhâ€|Reborn?" Dino says, and Tsuna can almost see the man turning to look between Squalo and his former tutor.

The reply was a sigh of a man who had reached his limit.

"Do what you want."

\* \* \*

><p>When Nono wakes up, it's in a hospital room. A glance to his side reveals that none of his Guardians have made it to Italy yet. He sighs, and waits to hear what happened in the final battle. Hopefully young Tsunayoshi had pulled through â€" he might not be any more stable than Xanxus, but Vongola have no other options.<p>

"Oi, Trash."

Nono tenses, and slowly pulls himself up. Xanxus is sitting in the corner, his throne invading a ridiculous amount of space. But sitting on the armrest, clad in the black leather of the Varia uniform, is a small teen with gravity defying hair.

And neither are wearing the ring.

"Xanxus?" Nono gasps. "Ts-Tsunayoshi? What is going on"

His youngest son grins, showing far too much teeth. "Hi old man. Thought I'd introduce you to the future leader of the Varia. I believe you've met Sawada-trash before, hmm?"

Tsunayoshi grins, and Nono feels a chill when he realises how similar the smiles appear to be.

\* \* \*

><p>It takes a week for Nono to be considered well enough for transport back to Italy, and the Varia are getting ready to follow. Tsunayoshi and his guardians are being left behind â€" still too young and inexperienced to handle the Varia just yet, though Xanxus fully intends to get them up to Quality before he has to hand over the reins.<p>

Before he leaves Japan though, an incident occurs that sends a panic through both the Varia and Varia-to-be. The shattered remains of the Vongola rings have vanished from his room. He'd been reluctant to toss them - the fixings have turned to dust, but the rocks have proven to be surprisingly difficult to shatter. It's going to be a problem if someone actually tries to fix them.

If the trash that took them comes back with fully functioning, \_rejection capable\_ rings, Xanxus might just burn this entire city to the ground.

Hell, he'll probably get Baby-Trash's help to do it.

The only thing stopping him from going on an immediate rampage is the letter that was left in their place:

'\_Dear Xanxus,\_'

\_I'm afraid these rings are too important to abandon completely. However, I understand their inheritance qualifications have caused problems. In two weeks, I shall provide you with new and improved rings to help solidify your position.\_

\_Kind regards\_

\_Kawahira'\_

True to his word. Not two weeks later Xanxus receives a parcel containing newly repaired rings. He's almost hesitant to place it on his finger, with his Inheritance Ceremony only hours away.

There's no need. The ring sits on his finger with pride, and his flames burn all the sweeter.

His smile is only matched by the Japanese contingent sitting in the front row.

\* \* \*

><p>Reborn hates not being in control. And with Xanxus receiving his inheritance and Tsuna neck deep in paperwork to prepare him for taking over the assassination side of Vongola business, he's about

ready to retire as a tutor. This entire job has been a nightmare from start to finish.<p>

However, he's never been a quitter, and though it might not be the Vongola boss, Tsuna still has a long way to go before he can take over the Varia. Reborn has even gotten a request from the future Vongola tenth to consider. In addition to boss training, in order to ascend to the Varia, one is expected to be fluent in seven languages. His former student only has two to his name, and only two years to remedy that.

A teaching job where his only responsibility is to cram languages into his student's head in between assassinations and the odd history lesson? Now \_that,\_ he can work with.

**\*\*END\*\***

End  
file.